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ABSTRACT

This handbook for teachers on conducting a successful parent-teacher conference offers suggestions on: (1) key factors of a successful conference; (2) kinds of individual conferences; (3) creating a positive conference environment; (4) preparing for the conference; (5) conducting the conference; (6) concluding the conference; (7) following the conference; and (8) evaluating the conference. The major points are briefly summarized and some questionable practices in parent-teacher conferencing are pointed out. The appendix includes a sample of a school district's parent guide and a sample form for summarizing a parent-teacher-student conference. (JD)

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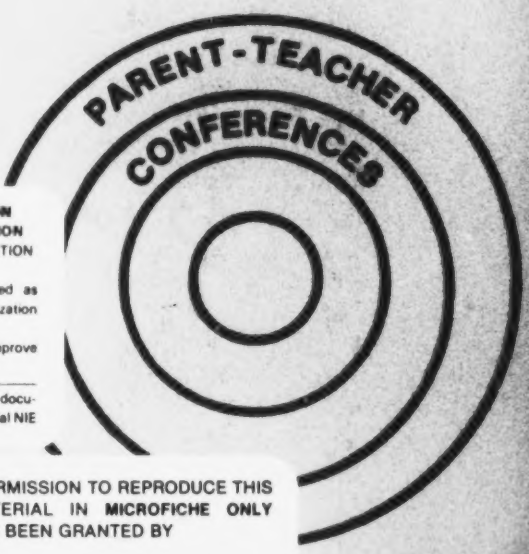

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FOCUS ON

PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

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INTRODUCTION TO PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

A parent-teacher conference is a two-way exchange of information and ideas about a child. Making parent-teacher conferences effective is not easy. They take plenty of planning, patience and practice. However, parent-teacher conferences have the potential for positive results, for they can inform, fulfil, and clarify.

As a teacher you are a very important person! Few professionals spend as much time with as many different individuals as teachers do. Other than parents, and in some cases close relatives, probably few adults have a greater influence on an individual's development than teachers. Henry Adams, the great historian-philosopher, stated: **"A teacher can affect eternity for it will never be known where the teacher's influence will end."**

Those who support the practice of parent-teacher conferences believe:

1. That the welfare of the child is a most important concern for parents and teachers.

2. That teachers and parents working together can accomplish more for children's welfare than either can accomplish alone.

3. That conferences can help improve the relationship between home and school by interpreting the curriculum and sharing with parents the goals of the school.

4. That there are various types of conferences and each serves a definite purpose:

   --Conferences to get acquainted
   --Conferences to supplement the report card
   --Conferences to share success and/or accomplishments
   --Conferences to deal with problem situations

5. That some problems can be "solved" in one conference, but others take more than a single conference to reach an appropriate solution.

6. That all conferences have common characteristics:

   --Must have specific purposes and always are concerned about the child's welfare.

   --Require planning and preparation prior to the conference.

   --Are scheduled in advance.

   --Are usually held in school.

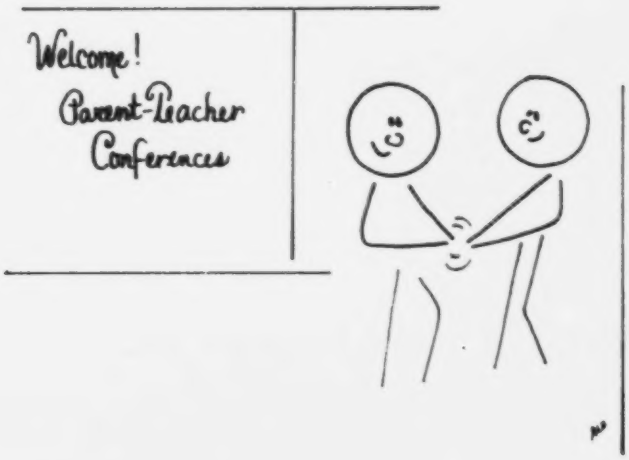
--Involve parents, teachers, and students for at least a segment of the conference.

--May sometimes involve a special teacher, the principal, a counselor, the social worker, or others.

--Include some type of follow-up after the conference.

--Involve evaluation of conference techniques in terms of welfare of the child.

7. That parents as well as teachers can request conferences.
8. That students can request a conference.
9. That students should be involved, at least part of the time, in the parent-teacher conference.



IMPORTANCE OF PARENT-TEACHER COOPERATION

All of us who work with middle school children have a common stake in the world of tomorrow. Parents and teachers, whether they realize it or not, stand side by side in helping to build the thoughts and lives of young people who will participate in the shaping of our society and civilization in the years ahead.

Because the home and school are involved in the development and education of each child, it is imperative that the guidance of children be a cooperative enterprise. It is only when there is understanding, appreciation, and active cooperation that a consistency in the child's experience can exist.

The teacher is in the best position to share with the parents the child's progress, achievements, interests, difficulties and enjoyments as revealed in the classroom in association with teachers and peers. Most teachers have a specialized knowledge of child psychology, but parents have the intimate knowledge of the child which they have gained through close association in the home environment.

Many parents appreciate a warm, caring kind of counsel based on a personal style of interaction as opposed to a clinical approach which is a less personal way of sharing information. By using an empathetic approach, the teacher is able to pass on the kinds of information that children usually do not convey to their parents. A child may share fragments of classroom events from his/her point of view. However, information which reflects the point of view of the teacher who observes the youngster daily in the classroom provides the parent with a basis for guiding the youngster in a more complete manner.

The teacher has the vantage point of being able to speak of learning and of growth and development which the child himself/herself may not see. This is extremely important in these days when school living and learning are coming to be seen as extending far beyond book knowledge since many of the things that a teacher considers important are less tangible than the number of pages read, lines written or problems solved.

An important aspect of communication between parents and teachers is that it allows for honest and open expression of feelings and ideas by the parents and by the teacher. The ability to identify with others is vitally important in creating a non-threatening environment conducive to good discussion. This means that the degree of parent-teacher involvement depends heavily upon the communication skills of the teacher. Therefore, the teacher must be alert to both the verbal and non-verbal signals and use these clues as feedback to enhance the discussion of content and further establish direction for continued work with the child.

It may be natural for teachers to stereotype parents negatively until they know them as individuals. Parents, likewise, may have preconceived negative perceptions of teachers and fail to see the positive qualities of individual teachers. Sometimes this happens because of negative childhood memories and sometimes it happens because of other unpleasant adult encounters. Nevertheless, it is important that both teachers and parents respect each other's emotional position and seek to view each other in light of personal experiences rather than preconceived perceptions.

Far too often, parent-teacher conferences focus only on the academic progress of the middle school student because parents see the middle school as the place where students are getting "ready" for the high school program. Middle school students may fail to get "ready" for high school unless both teachers and parents thoroughly understand the vast changes that the pre-adolescent child is experiencing at this time. The changes which occur during pre-adolescence can cause boys and girls to exhibit behaviors and attitudes which some psychologists believe closely resemble mental illness. As a result, interactions between pre-adolescent youth and adults can be extremely irritating to the adults as well as the children. Unless parents and teachers have a good understanding of what is normal behavior, they will have difficulty in working with a child. Conferences between parents and teachers provide opportunities to discuss behaviors and attitudes of the students and provide for cooperative planning to assist in facilitating positive emotional, intellectual and social growth during this difficult time.

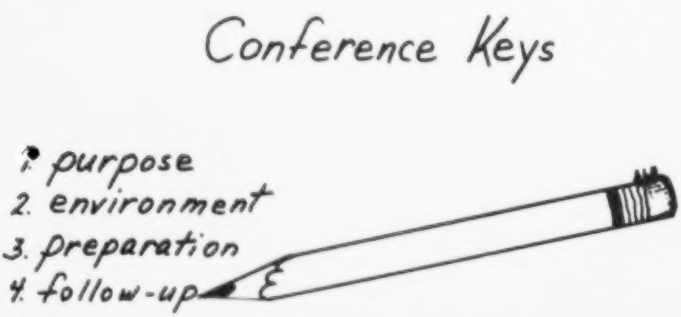
For example, parents need to know that between the ages of 12 and 14 there is virtually no increase in brain size and mass in the large majority of middle school children and that there is evidence that ability to master new information and ideas is closely related to the rate of brain growth in the individual. Parents need to understand that middle school children can be willing learners particularly regarding things which are useful and are related to their interests. Unfortunately, at this stage, student performance often fluctuates widely and thus elements of instability may be displayed.

Furthermore, some parents and forces outside the school and family encourage these students to move too quickly into adulthood. Many middle school youngsters are "taking the trappings" of adulthood at a faster pace than youngsters of past generations. Parent-teacher conferences provide an opportunity for teachers and parents to think and plan together to help these youngsters during this period of normal growing pains. As the old song goes, we need to **"Accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative, latch on to the affirmative, and don't mess with Mr. In-Between"**. Hopefully teachers and parents will help the middle school youngster to move successfully into adolescence.

KEY FACTORS IN A SUCCESSFUL CONFERENCE

Perhaps you are a beginning teacher and have never had a parent conference or, at best, very few. On the other hand, you may be an experienced teacher who has had many conferences. Some have "clicked" and some haven't! What has made the difference? What ingredients go into a good conference? Although there are many, the following are suggested as key elements that form the foundation upon which a good conference is built.

1. A mutually accepted and understood purpose for the conference.
2. An environment conducive to positive interactions.
3. A well-organized preparation for the parent-teacher conference.
4. A follow-up of the parent-teacher conference.



Clarity of Purpose

A parent or a teacher may initiate the scheduling of a conference at any time, for any purpose. Once teachers and parents come to the understanding that sharing what each knows about the child can collectively accomplish more for the child's well-being than either can accomplish individually, cooperative efforts will likely improve and the positive development of the child will be enhanced.

Here are some typical purposes of parent-teacher conferences:

1. To get acquainted with one or more members of the child's family.
2. To share common concerns about the child.

3. To supplement a report card.
4. To communicate the child's accomplishments and progress.
5. To discuss a problem situation.
6. To introduce the parents to the expectations and practices of the teacher.
7. To provide an opportunity to acquaint parents with the curriculum and objectives of the specific classroom.
8. To enhance better relations between home and school.

KINDS OF INDIVIDUAL CONFERENCES

Conferences to Get Acquainted

You may wish to have conferences of this nature early in the school year, so that you can seek and gain background information from the parents that will help you to better know and understand your students. This kind of conference may be quite short and more informal than some others. Nevertheless, it is very important.

Some of the things you may wish to consider are:

1. The child's interests, hobbies, and social activities.
2. The types of experiences the child has encountered.
3. The child's ability to get along with others.
4. Any possible problems that the child may experience in the school setting.
5. The role of the child in the family/home situation.
6. The teacher's wish to share personal and professional information.
7. The parent's expectations for the child.

Conferences to Supplement the Report Card

The report card with its symbols does not begin to tell the parent of the child's progress in school. However, a parent-teacher conference does provide the opportunity to learn much more about the child's successes and shortcomings by detailing information with samples of his/her work.

FORM A
REQUESTING A CONFERENCE

_____
(Date)

Dear Parent,

A personal conference with you will help me to do a better job in meeting the educational needs of your child.

Will you check your schedule and see if

Day: _____

Date: _____

Time: _____

would be convenient?

Sincerely,

_____
(Teacher's Signature)

. . . . . .

Please return this portion to your child's teacher.

Dear Teacher,

We wish to acknowledge that the suggested conference time (is), (is not) suitable. You can count on our attendance and participation in this conference as we are likewise interested in the educational growth of your child.

_____ , _____ , _____
(Day) (Date) (Time)

_____
(Parent's Signature)

In planning for this type of conference the teacher needs to focus on these questions:

1. What are the child's grades/test scores?

2. Does the child's performance reflect the best the child can do?

3. What could the child do to improve his/her academic performance?

4. What concrete examples, such as class written assignments, test papers, and other activities, show the parent evidence of the child's progress?

5. How could the parents help the child to experience greater success in his/her academic work?

In the middle school, the student will have more than one assigned teacher as was likely the experience in the elementary school. It is therefore imperative that, if the middle school has an advisor-advisee program, the principal and teachers work out a system which will enable the advisor to obtain information about the child's progress in each subject area prior to the conference. One school district has developed a system that includes a half-sheet which is sent to each of the child's teachers for the purpose of recording specific information which enables the advisor to talk intelligently about the grades assigned to the student. Samples of the child's work are stapled to this report. Occasionally, when a child is having serious problems in a particular subject, provisions are made for the parent to meet with the teacher. If, however, a child is having difficulty in many subjects, it is not recommended that all of these teachers meet with the parent. This procedure can be overwhelming to the parent and defeat the purpose of the parent-teacher conference.

Conferences to Share Success and Accomplishments

Usually the news that is most enjoyable to give and receive is "good news." Thus, when a child experiences an accomplishment or achieves some type of success, it is good to invite the parents in and share this good news with them. If the achievement is sudden, it will likely be noticed by the parent. If the accomplishment has been more of a gradual process, it may have gone unrecognized. Regardless of the circumstances, the good feeling that comes with success is one that is worth sharing.

Conferences to Deal with a Problem

At the pre-adolescent stage, teachers and parents will experience problems which may be related to the child's school work or problems related to his/her relationship with peers or other adults, or problems related to physical development. Whatever the

problem, it is imperative that the teacher provide specific information in understandable language for the parent. Educational terminology such as intelligence quotient, grade level performance, individualized instruction, etc. should be avoided or should be explained to the parent. Too much jargon can give parents a negative impression. On the other hand, there are expressions which are more appropriate and leave a positive feeling. Here are some examples:

Avoid These Negative Expressions	The Positive Way To Say It
Troublemaker	Continually disturbs others
Dirty	Poor health habits
Swears	Uses objectionable language
Cheats	Doesn't do his/her own work
Show-off	Tries to get attention
Selfish	Seldom shares with others
Uncooperative	Needs to learn how to work with others
Sloppy	Can do neater work

Some suggestions for planning for and conducting conferences:

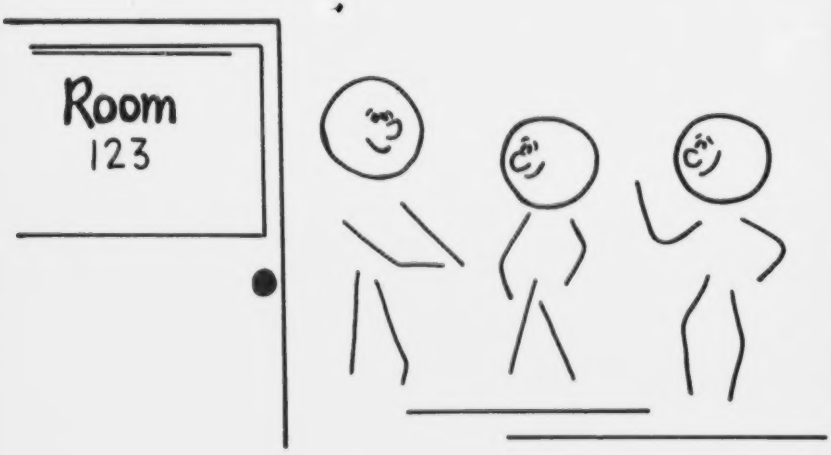
1. Provide specific examples of school work which show the parents first-hand the difficulties the child is experiencing in his/her studies.
2. Share with parents the anecdotal records which identify behavior problems in the school environment.
3. Learn of any problems at home that may be contributing to school problems.
4. Ask the parents for suggestions which might alleviate the problem.
5. Be objective. Keep yourself emotionally uninvolved.
6. Reach a solution or alternative solutions which are agreed upon by both teacher and parent.
7. Plan for a follow-up conference to determine if progress has been observed.

8. Ask questions which channel the discussion:
   Are you aware of the problem?
   Is your child aware of the problem?
   What do you think caused this problem?
   What can we do about it?

On the other hand, parents will ask questions which will reflect their feelings. Some of the questions they might ask are:

   Do many children have problems like this?
   Are we at fault?
   How did this problem develop?
   What can we do?

Such conferences should terminate with positively stated plans for helping the child solve his/her problems. Both teacher and parents must agree to work together in resolving the child's problem.



CREATING A POSITIVE CONFERENCE ENVIRONMENT

Some parents attend parent-teacher conferences with the enthusiasm of a visit to the dentist's office! There is the hope that there will be good news, but often there is the expectation that the teacher will have something unpleasant to share. Therefore, the personal atmosphere and the physical environment of the conference setting is a significant factor in creating an accepting atmosphere conducive to the open and honest expression of significant information.

The Physical Environment

The following are some important things to consider when setting up the physical environment for the conference:

1. Plan a physical environment that is neat, attractive and which displays samples of the child's school work.

2. Choose chairs that are appropriate for the adult size and stature so that parents will be comfortable.

3. Select tables or desks that are the same height in an effort to help parents feel as important as the teacher.

4. Arrange the furniture in a triangular position so as to eliminate the authoritarian posture created by the teacher sitting behind the teacher's desk.

5. Insure privacy by being sure the door is closed or appropriate sound barriers are erected.

6. Offer coffee or tea in the waiting area to set a cordial mood.

The Personal Environment

A personal atmosphere that allows both parents and teachers to feel non-threatened, spontaneous, and receptive is created, in part, by employing the types of ideas that are listed below:

1. Prepare an informal setting which allows you to sit beside the parents rather than across from them.

2. Establish a warm, friendly atmosphere by greeting the parents as welcomed guests.

3. Keep the atmosphere pleasant, relaxed, and unhurried even though crucial issues may arise.

4. Convey a warm personal attitude while maintaining a professional manner.

5. Talk **with** parents rather than **at** them.

6. Be honest, but tactful at all times.

7. Be sensitive to the social and emotional needs of the parents.

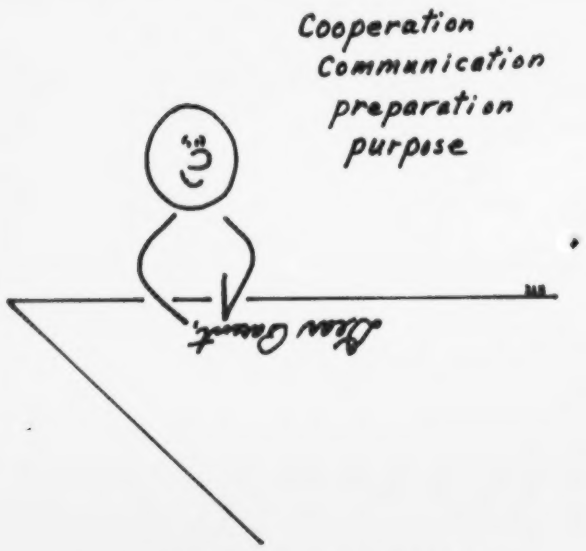
8. Be a good listener.

9. Show enthusiasm for the activity in which you are engaged.

10. Establish and maintain eye contact.

11. Use clarifying statements or paraphrase parent comments so you are sure you undertand what the parent means.

12. Allow time for questions and comments from the parents.



PREPARING FOR THE CONFERENCE

One of the key factors which contributes to a successful parent-teacher conference is **preparation**. It is crucial that you do your homework! Successful conferences don't just happen. They are the result of careful planning and a diligent effort on the part of all those involved.

The Teacher's Part

The information that is gathered depends on the purpose of the conference. Once this purpose is established, you may want to do some or all of the following by way of preparation:

1. Study the cumulative records of the student.

2. Review current test results looking for clues to help you anticipate parent's questions.

3. Keep anecdotal records.

4. Observe the student's attitude toward others: students, teachers, staff.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

FORM B
CONFERENCE PRE-PLANNING GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

PARENT CONFERENCE REPORT

NAME _____ **DATE** _____ **TEACHER** _____

PART A. To be Prepared Prior to Conference
(Check items to be discussed)

Reason for Conference: Regular ☐ Special ☐

Attendance
1. Absent too many times
2. Tardy too often

Activities
3. Too many activities
4. TV programs
5. Homework

Attitudes Towards Class Work
6. Shows fine class attitude
7. Cooperative
8. Does not cooperate
9. Has ability to do better
10. Does not pay attention
11. Talks out of turn
12. Talks when the teacher talks

Class Work
13. Applies acquired knowledge
14. Does creative original thinking
15. Does average work in class
16. Does not participate in class recitation
17. Monopolizes class recitations
18. Improvement of work
19. Does his best work in _____
20. Does his poorest work in _____
21. Does exceptionally well in _____
22. Work not up to previous level

Personal Traits
23. Health
24. Posture
25. Sleep
26. Nervous habits
27. Appearance and cleanliness
28. Nails
29. Use of handkerchief
30. Talks in a quiet pleasant voice

Self Discipline
31. Has ability to determine right from wrong
32. Is willing to do right when informed
33. Uses self-control
34. Appears cheerful and contented
35. Self-reliant
36. Does only the work he likes to do
37. Keeps hands off others

Social Attitudes
38. Courteous to teachers and adults
39. Courteous to classmates
40. Obeys requests cheerfully
41. Is willing to help others
42. Has respect for rules of group
43. Works with others
44. Plays with others
45. Ability to accept criticism
46. Ability to give criticism
47. Interrupts while others are speaking
48. Talks out loud or whispers too much

Preparation of Assigned Work
49. Required work, very good
50. Does work in addition to required work
51. Work neatly done
52. Work in on time
53. Has to be reminded to have work done and in on time
54. Makes good use of supplementary materials
55. Required work incomplete
56. Need for more accuracy

Study Habits
57. Has ability to listen
58. Follows directions
59. Attacks work independently
60. Uses spare time well
61. Does neat and careful work
62. Is willing to try
63. Tries to improve
64. Gives up easily
65. Requires much help
66. Refuses to do work

Materials
67. Is responsible for own materials
68. Wastes materials
69. Care of books and finished work
70. Ability to assume responsibility to provide himself with proper working materials

5. Make a sample collection of the student's work over a period of time.

6. Collect information related to interests, hobbies, and school.

7. Obtain information from other teachers who work with the student.

8. Decide which information is pertinent to the conference objective.

9. Consider interviewing the student prior to the parent-teacher conference.

10. Try to anticipate questions parents are likely to ask.

11. Prepare information regarding services offered by the school district for children who may have special needs.

12. Prepare a handout which briefly explains your expectations, goals, rules, and other significant information.

The Parents' Part

Parents are usually eager to make a contribution to the goals of the conference. However, they are often uncertain as to what information might be of value. Therefore, you might suggest to the parents that they gather certain pieces of information and have it available at the conference. By making this suggestion in advance, it will allow the parent time to make necessary observations or collect any requested data. This preparatory period certainly does not prohibit or preclude spontaneous questions or sharing of information. What it does do is encourage pre-thinking, so that the material may be more carefully collected and thus more pertinent to the purpose.

You may want to suggest that the parents have information related to some or all of the following:

1. Health and medical records.

2. Attitude toward parents and siblings.

3. Voiced attitude toward school.

4. Friendships.

5. Responsibilities at home.

6. Hobbies and special talents.

7. Homework and study habits.

FORM C-1

SHOREWOOD INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL
SHOREWOOD, WISCONSIN

Dear _____

You are invited to study this form, and BRING IT WITH YOU for the conference about your child's development and program.

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

TIME _____ TO _____

DATE _____ ROOM _____

If you find it impossible to keep the above schedule, please notify me as soon as possible and indicate below a more convenient time. We hope it will not be necessary for you to do this.

PREFERRED CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

TIME _____ TO _____

DATE _____ ROOM _____

_____
TEACHER

FORM C-2

PURPOSES OF PARENT-PUPIL-TEACHER CONFERENCES

1. Getting better acquainted and exchanging information for mutual understanding.
2. Evaluating the student's total progress - in and out of school.
3. Seeking solutions to problems related to the student's learning and behavior.

PARENTS'-STUDENT'S PRE-PLANNING

Parents are urged to discuss their child's growth and development, and prior to the conference, list any significant observations or concerns.

FORM C-3

CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS
(for parent use at conference)

A. Responsibility and Dependability:

B. Social Adjustments:

C. Academic Performance:

D. Work Habits:

E. Other:

FORM C-4

COOPERATIVE PLANS

Plans mutually formed by teacher and parent(s) to help the student more nearly realize optimum development and achievement:

POST CONFERENCE

Parents are asked to discuss the conference information thoughtfully and constructively with one another and with their child. It is well to keep it in perspective as an along-the-way measurement.

8. Any recent changes in behavior or attitude.

Although the teacher has the major responsibility for pre-planning a parent-teacher conference, one school district developed a pre-planning guide for parents. With a ready set of questions, parents will feel more at ease if they have an opportunity to share this information with the teacher. (C-1, -2, -3, -4)

The Child's Part

Students are curious and often apprehensive about the parent-teacher conference. What will the teacher tell my parents? What will my parents tell my teacher? Since each is a significant adult in the life of a child, it seems wise to include the child in preparation for the conference.

You may wish to involve the child in your preparation for the conference by asking him/her to do any or all of the following:

1. Complete interest and/or self-inventory questionnaires.
2. Put together a file of written work in all subject areas.
3. Compile a folder of items that may be of interest to the parents, such as art work and creative writings.
4. Write personal comments or possible solutions to problems that may have arisen.

FORM D

STUDENT PRE-PLANNING GUIDE FOR PARENT-TEACHER-STUDENT CONFERENCE

1. List at least five items that you think your parents would be interested in discussing in a three-way conference with you and your advisor.

   a.

   b.

   c.

   d.

   e.

2. What other items might you wish to discuss at the conference?

3. Do you and your parents have general agreement about your school program and objectives?

4. Do you and your parents have special problems or concerns about any aspects of your schooling? Please specify.

5. What specific subject areas do you need to know more about before the conference?

CONDUCTING THE CONFERENCE

The parents have been notified of the time, place and purpose of the conference. The day of the conference is here. You are hopeful that the conference will be a pleasant experience. You find yourself in familiar surroundings, but some parents may feel uneasy coming to school to attend a conference. The very smell of chalk dust may bring some unhappy remembrances of school.

Conferences can be very pleasant experiences. All concerned can benefit from the understanding gained in these parent-teacher conferences. These simple guidelines should help a teacher in conducting a successful conference.

1. Be positive. Begin the conference by enumerating favorable points.
2. Be truthful, yet tactful.
3. Be constructive in all suggestions to parents.
4. Respect parents' and children's information as confidential.
5. Remain poised throughout the conference.
6. Be a good listener; let the parents talk. Be sure you understand what they say.
7. Involve the parents in discovering solutions to a problem.
8. Keep vocabulary simple: explain new terminology.
9. Review with the parents any notes you took during the conference.
10. Invite parents to visit and participate in school functions.
11. Base your judgments on all available facts from actual situations.
12. Offer more than one possible solution to a problem.
13. Plan with the parents procedures and practices that will be followed.
14. Make written copies of the plan for the parents and the child when appropriate.

CONCLUDING THE CONFERENCE

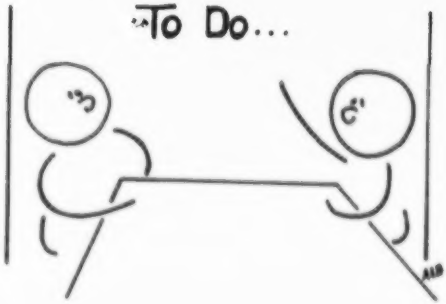
In concluding a conference, a teacher needs to do the following:

1. Restate the purposes of the conference.
2. Review the points of mutual agreement.
3. Point out definite things that need to be done to deal with the problem.
4. Make a written record of the agreements established during the conference with copies for the parents and the child, when appropriate.
5. Make plans for a future conference if needed.

FOLLOWING THE CONFERENCE

Although much time and effort is involved in the preparation and participation of a conference, the real value of the conference begins once the actual conference ends. Sound confusing? Let's take a more in-depth look at this thought.

First, it is assumed that some important issues and information were discussed during the conference. In order to follow through with suggestions that were initiated in the conference, both the teacher and the parents need to do some follow-up activities.



Suggestions for Parents:

1. Discuss the conference with your child, pointing out the areas of strength and areas that need efforts toward improvement.
2. Be sure that your child understands that you and the teacher are cooperating by supporting each other, with the sole aim of helping him/her get the best education possible.
3. Start to implement activities with the child that you agreed to do in the conference.
4. Evaluate the plan of action on a regular basis to determine whether or not the intended purposes are being accomplished.
5. Let the teacher know what you have done and what it has accomplished.

Suggestions for Teacher:

1. Write a conference report of what transpired before it is forgotten.
2. Record only pertinent data, and most importantly, the outcomes of the conference.
3. If the child is not included in the conference then share with the child the outcomes of the conference.
4. Share with the principal, social worker, or concerned others the mutual plans agreed upon for the purpose of facilitating these agreed upon plans.

FORM E

CONFERENCE SUMMARY

DATE OF CONFERENCE: _____ TIME: _____

PLACE OF CONFERENCE: _____

PARTICIPANTS: _____

_____

PURPOSES OF CONFERENCE: _____

_____

OUTCOMES OF CONFERENCE: _____

_____

RECOMMENDATIONS: _____

_____

_____

SIGNED: _____

POSITION: _____

SCHOOL: _____

EVALUATING THE CONFERENCE

Some of the questions that a teacher should ask after the conclusion of the conference are as follows:

1. Was the physical set-up "just right"?
2. Did I clearly state the purposes of the conference?
3. Did I keep my vocabulary simple and explain new terminology?
4. Did I let the parents know of the responsibilities I am willing to assume?
5. Did I help make the parents aware of the responsibilities they might assume?
6. Did I establish rapport between parents and myself so that they felt that I was ready to develop a better learning environment for their child?
7. Did I give leadership and direction to the conference?
8. Did I review with the parents any notes I took during the conference?
9. Did I summarize the tasks that need the attention of the parents and myself?
10. Did the interview end at just "the right time"?
11. Did the conference result in an improved program for the child?

CONCLUDING STATEMENT

The parent-teacher conference, if properly utilized, is of exceptional value because it is a cooperative process involving parents, teachers and, whenever appropriate, the middle school child. The conference helps teachers and parents to better understand the student, and to assist him/her to improve and grow academically, socially, and emotionally. Often the information shared by the parent is of greater importance than the information given by the teacher.

Teachers can gain understanding of the student's relationships to his/her siblings and parents and his/her relations with friends and relatives. The parents can gain insights about the child's performance in school work, how he/she gets along with the classmates, and likes and dislikes. Through the discussion technique of the parent-teacher conference, barriers can often be avoided between school and home, and misunderstandings between the teacher and the parent can be cleared up.

In conclusion, the following statements should serve to give a summary of the major points concerning parent-teacher conferences:

1. The teacher and the parent have the same concern, the child.
2. The teacher wants to know about the factors in the child's home life while the parents want assistance from the teacher.
3. The parent-teacher conference should be used for discussion, not for lecturing.
4. The trend is for parents to attend parent-teacher conferences to learn more about the school's program and the growth and development of their child.
5. There is a real need for in-service training of teachers on how to carry on a successful conference.
6. Parent-teacher conferences can result in more harm than good unless handled skillfully.
7. Parent-teacher conferences should be an integral part of the school day. Released time should be provided for this important activity.
8. Specialized arrangements may be necessary when the conference involves parents who are employed.

WHAT A PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCE IS NOT

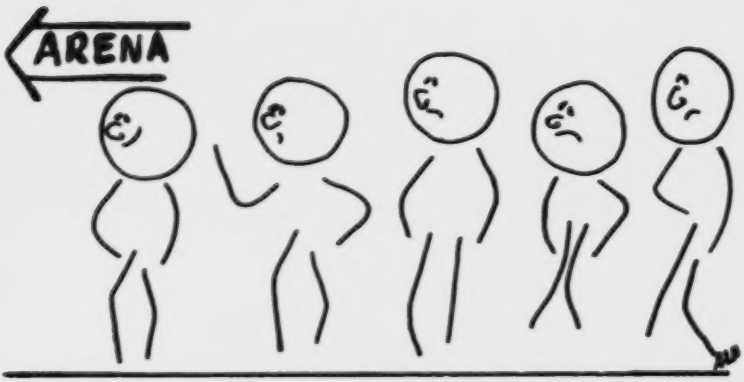
Unfortunately, some questionable practices have emerged in the middle school movement under the guise of parent-teacher conferences. One of them is the "arena-type" conference which violates much that is known about successful parent-teacher conferences. In this type of conference, all teachers assemble in the gymnasium. Parents have an opportunity to visit with one or more teachers for a short period of time. Some of the criticisms of this type of conference follow:

1. There are no assigned times for a conference so a parent has to wait in line to see a particular teacher. Some parents claim that they spent more than two hours to complete the process of seeing several teachers.

2. Parents feel the pressure of having to hurry in the few minutes allotted because so many parents are lined up to see a particular teacher.

3. Parents are hesitant to discuss **real** problems because of lack of privacy with other parents and teachers nearby.

One parent summed up the the "arena-type" conference by stating, **"It reminds me of college registration-a chaotic situation".**



APPENDIX

SAMPLE OF A SCHOOL DISTRICT'S
PARENT GUIDE

(Cover)

SHOREWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Shorewood, Wisconsin

A PARENT'S GUIDE
FOR
REPORTING PUPIL PROGRESS

"Good Schools Make Communities Better"

Dear Parents:

Continuous evaluation of the pupil's school progress and adjustment is an obligation of both the teacher and parents. This task can be accomplished most effectively through a close working relationship among those dealing with the child.

This information is presented to assist you and the teacher to evaluate pupil progress cooperatively. We are indebted to the mutual efforts and thinking of a joint committee of parents and teachers for the preparation of these materials. It is hoped that the ideas and procedures herein outlined will benefit all concerned.

We sincerely believe that close cooperation between the home and school is most important. Your interest and assistance is very much appreciated.

(Page 1)

WHAT IS A PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCE?

A parent-teacher conference is a planned, scheduled meeting involving a teacher and one or both parents. In some instances the child may be included in the meeting.

The purposes of conferences are:

1. To evaluate the child's progress and to promote the mutual understanding of the pupil's achievement.
2. To obtain information about the school and its program.
3. To provide an opportunity for participants to get acquainted.

The conference provides an opportunity for bringing together, and discussing all available information from the school and home which is related to the child's welfare and development.

(Page 2)

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HOW ARE CONFERENCES SCHEDULED?

WHEN?

Scheduled Conference

Eighteen conference periods are scheduled throughout the school year. A List of these dates are included in the P.T.A. Handbook.

Grades 6-6 2:30 p.m.-4:00 p.m.

Additional Conference

Conferences may be requested by the teacher or parent in addition to the scheduled conferences.

WHERE? Conferences are held at school in the child's homeroom.

NUMBER? Two conferences will be scheduled for each child, one each semester. In some instances, more conferences may be necessary.

AUXILIARY TEACHER Auxiliary teachers of special subjects and special services may wish to comment on a child's progress. Such notations are given to the classroom teacher prior to the conference. Occasionally, the auxiliary teacher will participate in the conference.

LENGTH? It is suggested that half an hour be allotted to each conference.

(Page 3)

WHAT IS THE PARENT'S PART?

Parents will receive a Parent-Teacher Conference Guide which they are encouraged to study and bring to the conference.

The following suggestions may be useful to the parent in preparation for a conference:

Information in the following areas:

a. Your child's health.
b. His attitude toward school.
c. His attitude toward home.
d. His ability to get along with others.
e. His out-of-school activities.
f. His special talents.

The above information will help the teacher to better understand your child. The teacher desires to do her very best with each student.

If possible, provision should be made for the care of younger children as well as the children who have been dismissed so that the conference may be held without interruption.

(Page 4)

WHAT IS THE TEACHER'S PART?

The classroom teacher will plan a conference discussion which may include the following:

The child's academic progress.
The child's relation to non-academic activities.
The child's health habits.
The child's social and emotional development.
Exhibits of the child's school work.

On the basis of the discussion held at the conference, plans may be mutually formed by the parent and teacher to help the child more nearly realize optimum development and achievement.

(Page 5)

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WHAT REPORTS ARE SENT TO PARENTS?

Three kinds of written reports regarding the pupil are sent to parents. These reports come from the child's teacher. The letters or notes will have to do with some aspect of the child's adjustment and progress.

Contact Notes: Brief written statements sent home regarding the child are called contact notes. These serve to call the attention of the parent to a recent development about the pupil's adjustment or achievement.

Progress Report: An analytical report of the child's achievement and school adjustment will be mailed to the parent during the latter part of the school year.

Placement Card: A card indicating the status of the child for the next school year is called a placement card. It is sent home with the child on the last day of school.

(Page 6)

A FORM TO SUMMARIZE THE RESULTS OF A PARENT-TEACHER-STUDENT CONFERENCE

PARENT-TEACHER-STUDENT CONFERENCE REPORT

ART_____
MUSIC_____
PHY. ED._____
LIBRARIAN_____
PRINCIPAL_____

NAME OF PARENT: MRS. N. NAME OF CHILD: BILL

DATE OF CONFERENCE: 4/8/83 1ST_____, 2ND X, 3RD___ GRADE: 6

CONFERENCE CALLED BY:_____ ROOM:_____

A. PURPOSE OF CONFERENCE: COMMENT ON IMPROVEMENT IN BACKGROUND READING AND NEED FOR GREATER NEATNESS IN WRITTEN WORK.

B. SUMMARY OF CONFERENCE DISCUSSION: BILL HAS IMPROVED HIS BACKGROUND READING FOR SCIENCE AND SOCIAL STUDIES WRITTEN AND ORAL REPORTS. HIS EFFORTS ARE MORE INTERESTING AND AUTHORITATIVE. HIS DIAGRAMS CONVEY GOOD UNDERSTANDING OF WORK BEING STUDIED. ESSENTIALLY HE HAS NEVER LACKED THE SKILL OR ABILITY TO SELECT IMPORTANT UNDERSTANDING, BUT HE LEAVES THE IMPRESSION OF CARELESSNESS, ESPECIALLY IN HIS WRITTEN PRESENTATION.

HE FAILS TO REVISE HIS NOTES IN AN ORDERLY AND FINAL MANNER. IT APPEARS AS IF HE IS ONLY ANXIOUS TO COMPLETE THE TASK AT HAND AS RAPIDLY AS POSSIBLE WITH LITTLE REGARD FOR REVISION OR CHECKING. THIS IS ALSO TRUE OF HIS MATH WORK, WHICH IS INCONSISTENT.

C. PLANS MUTUALLY FORMULATED DURING THE CONFERENCE: WHEN BILL HANDS IN HIS NEXT WRITTEN WORK, IT WILL BE REQUIRED OF HIM TO EXECUTE IT MORE CAREFULLY AND NEATER BEFORE IT CAN BE ACCEPTED BY HIS TEACHER. BILL SHOULD CHECK HIS MATH WORK DAILY. IF HE MISSES MORE THAN TWO OUT OF TEN, HE WILL BE GIVEN ADDITIONAL WORK.

TEACHER

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A FORM TO SUMMARIZE THE RESULTS OF
A PARENT-TEACHER-STUDENT CONFERENCE

REPORT ON PARENT-TEACHER-STUDENT CONFERENCE

A REPORT ON THE CONFERENCE OF Mrs. S. GRADE 7 H.R. _____

ROUTE REPORT THROUGH ASST. PRINCIPAL, PUPIL'S TEACHERS, PRINCIPAL, COUNSELOR

Mr. K, Mrs. S., Mr. P. Miss G.

ATTENDED BY: MOTHER X, FATHER _____, OTHERS _____

CONFERENCE HELD: AFTERNOON X, EVENING _____, DATE 12/14/82

PRESENT TEACHERS' RATING ON: BETTY

RESPONSIBILITY AND DEPENDABILITY ___ HIGH X AVERAGE ___ LOW ___

SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT ___ HIGH ___ AVERAGE X LOW ___

INFLUENCE AMONG CLASSMATES ___ HIGH ___ AVERAGE X LOW ___

WORK HABITS ___ HIGH X AVERAGE ___ LOW ___

COMMENTS: BETTY IS AN UNUSUAL CHILD - GOOD ABILITY, ARTICULATE, EAGER AND COOPERATIVE. HER SERIOUS PROBLEM IS IN SPELLING AND IN WRITING. ATTENTION TO THIS PROBLEM HAS BEEN GIVEN IN HER PREVIOUS GRADES AND AT THE PRESENT TIME.

BETTY'S FATHER IS A PSYCHOLOGIST. HE IS EAGER TO PURSUE THE CAUSES OF THIS SPELLING AND WRITING PROBLEM. MRS. S. STATED THAT HER HUSBAND WILL SHARE THE INFORMATION WITH ME ON HIS FINDINGS.

MRS. S. WAS SHOWN SOME OF THE REMEDIAL MATERIALS USED WITH BETTY TO HELP HER IMPROVEMENT IN SPELLING. SAMPLES OF HER WRITTEN WORK ARE SHARED WITH MRS. S.

LATER CONFERENCE JAN. 19, 1983

BETTY IS EXPERIENCING SOME DIFFICULTIES. SHE IS BECOMING CONFUSED, WITHDRAWN, AND REFUSES TO PERFORM. SHE BLAMES HER INABILITY TO SEE. I HAVE PLACED HER IN THE FRONT OF THE ROOM, BUT SHE STILL COMPLAINS.

BOTH PARENTS AGREE THAT AN EYE EXAMINATION EARLY IN THE SCHOOL YEAR SHOWED THAT SHE HAS GOOD EYES. FATHER FEELS THAT THERE IS A REAL NEED FOR A PSYCHIATRIC EXAMINATION. PLANS WILL BE MADE FOR HER TO GET SOME HELP OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL.

COMMENTS JUNE, 1983: MRS. S. CALLED TO SAY THAT BETTY IS RECEIVING PSYCHIATRIC ASSISTANCE. SHE IS REGULARLY HAVING CONFERENCES WITH THE PSYCHIATRIST. MOTHER ASKED IF BETTY SHOULD ATTENT SUMMER SCHOOL. I RECOMMENDED THAT BETTY HAVE A FREE SUMMER CONSIDERING THAT SHE IS REGULARLY SEEING A PSYCHIATRIST.

DATE: _____ ADVISOR _____

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To the Reader:

The Michigan Association of Middle School Educators has a number of publications available to those interested in the middle school child. They include:

Middle School-A Position Paper, by Tony Egnatuk, Nicholas P. Georgiady, C. Robert Muth and Louis G. Romano. **$2.50**

Focus on Middle School Belief System, by Frank S. Bloom, Glen K. Gerard, and Addie Kinsinger. **$2.50**

Focus on Interscholastic Sports and the Middle School, by C. Kenneth McEwin (Focus on why interscholastic sports should not be in the middle school). **$2.50**

Do You Have a Middle School?, by Louis G. Romano, Susan Pressel, Margaret Sandbar, and Ken Wagner. (A checklist for educators and parents to assess whether or not you have a middle school). **10 copies for $1.00**

Complete Middle School Bibliography, by Sylvia P. Whitmer (Includes articles, books and audiovisual materials). **$5.00**

Focus on Team Teaching, by Robert Cross and Sue Cross. **$2.50**

Focus on Physical Education, Intramurals and Interscholastics, by Glen K. Gerard, Robert R. Schwenter and Fred Watters. **$2.50**

Evaluative Criteria for a Middle School, by William W. Powell and Louis G. Romano (A self-evaluation instrument designed for the middle school). **$5.00**

A Middle School-A Humanizing Effort, by Addie Kinsinger and Louis G. Romano (A filmstrip-cassette on Who is a transescent?, What are the needs of a transescent?, What teaching-learning strategies should be used in a middle school?, and How to become a middle school?). **$21.95**

Michigan Middle School Journal, Published twice a year plus at least two other publications for the membership of $15.00 per year.

A Crash Course on Parenting the Pre-Adolescent, by Dolly McMaster. **10 copies for $1.00**

Cassette Tapes of Outstanding Speeches ($6 each)

"Forward to Basics and Humanizing the Schools: The Possible Dream", Dr. Zachary Clements.

"Who's in the Middle in the Middle School?", Dr. Paul Pearsall.

"Brain Growth in the Pre-Adolescent", Dr. Conrad Toepfer.

"How to Become the Wizard...", Joel Goodman

"Reading in the Content Areas", Jacqueline Tillis.

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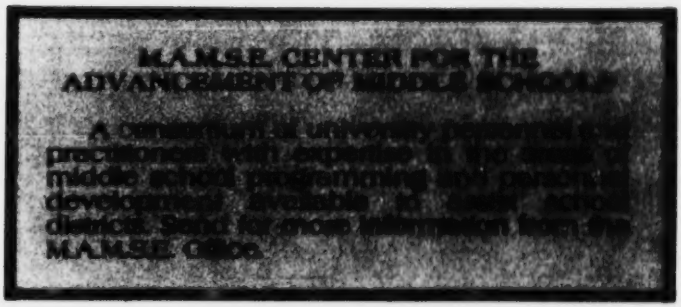
Michigan State University
College of Education
419 Erickson Hall
East Lansing, MI 48824



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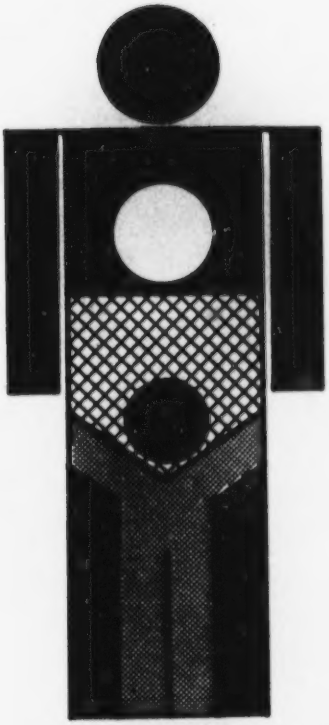

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